

## The House

The house sat on the tallest hill in a field full of small hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks. Wildflowers of every color covered nearly every square inch of the field. The flowers were orange and white daisies, yellow dandelions, bluebells and cornflowers, indigo and purple violets, pink, red and magenta snapdragons, and rainbows of lilies. All of the flowers appeared to dance in the breeze along the field of hills. The house stood above them all, a king before his jesters, a guest of honor observing a private performance of a finely-choreographed ballet.

The house was not much of a house; in fact, a one-room shack would be a better term for the dilapidated structure. The once freshly painted white habitat had been weathered by years and years of rain, snow, wind gusts and hail. A wind-stripped dull grey, its original wood bore no resemblance to the fresh look of a newly cut board from a recently felled tree. The house was an eyesore. The beautiful field of hills, flowers, valleys, streams and winding creeks was said to be robbed of its natural beauty by the decrepit blemish in its center.

The people of the town a quarter mile south of the field of hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks often debated what should be done with the house. The old folks wanted to “leave it be,” saying “It’s part of our heritage!” and “Shouldn’t nobody be traipsing around in the field of hills.” When asked why the field and its rickety residence should be left alone, none of the old folks could give a reason. Either they could not remember, or they did not want to remember. The younger generation wanted to tear down the shack and turn the field of hills into a park or a suburb. They said “It would be a beautiful place for our children to play” and “Think of the real estate value of the land!” No one could ever agree on a course of action.

Meanwhile, the house sat on its perch on the tallest of the hills in the field of hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks, enjoying its view of the impromptu flower dances and the town a quarter mile to the south.

As time passed, the old folks passed, and the younger generation became the old folks. The new old folks eyed the field of hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks and thought “It would be a beautiful place for our grandchildren to play.” The younger

generation agreed with the old folks. The townspeople began searching for the owner of the field of hills. The county deeds office had no record of the field's ownership. According to the zoning office, the field of hills did not exist. The townspeople were stumped and moved on to more pressing town issues. Years passed, and the house remained standing on the top of the tallest hill in the field of hills.

A man moved into town. The man was of average height and build, approaching middle age. His eyes were the color of the depths of the ocean on a cloudy day in late September; a steel gray blue so piercing that one look had the power to force the subject of the glance to stop in his tracks. These eyes were the most beautiful eyes that any of the townspeople had ever seen. They spoke of the eyes for weeks, until they noticed his smile. His smile was brilliant, radiant, white, enigmatic. Combined with those magnetic eyes, the man's smile was irresistible. The beauty of his features was marred by one flaw: his nose. The man's nose was three times too big for his face. Oh, that nose! with its pinched bridge hooked into an upturned bulbous tip, framed by nostrils caught in a permanent flare, it ruined his face, it distracted from those beautiful eyes and that radiant smile.

The man claimed to be the owner of the field of hills, and he supported his claim by producing a deed to the land. The deed had been validated some 150 years back, before the county deeds office had burned down after being struck by lightning half a century ago. The townspeople were ecstatic. "Please Sir, let me purchase the field of hills from you" and "The town sure could use that land, Mister" were phrases heard by the man everywhere he went. Little did the townspeople know, the man could not and would not ever sell his field of hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks, where the flowers danced to entertain the house.

After many failed attempts to purchase the man's field of hills, the townspeople began to resent him. They whispered about his monstrous nose, how it spoiled his beautiful face. Occasionally, a particularly mean spirited townspeople would personally insult the man's nose. The man had always been ashamed of his misshapen snout, despite his mother's claims that it gave him character. He had always been ashamed, but he had not been insulted because of it since childhood. His pride crumbled a little each time an insensitive comment came his way. After a while, the man began to contemplate having his nose fixed. A young woman in town agreed to court him. They spent many evenings walking and talking. The man spoke to her of turning that old rickety shack into a homestead for the two of them, if she would marry him. The young woman admitted that she did love him, but she would never love his nose, and therefore she could not marry him.

The man was heartbroken, and determined that his nose had to be fixed. His magnetic steel grey blue eyes and brilliant enigmatic smile were no match for that nose. The man disappeared for weeks, and the townspeople were disappointed that they had not gotten

him to sell his field of hills to them prior to his departure. They spoke of trespassing into the field of hills in order to tear down the blight of a house on the tallest hill. If the man did not come back, how could he find out whether the shack was still there? How could he ever know if the townspeople began using the field of hills as a park? The townspeople began planning. They established a crew to tear down the house and replace it with a public facilities building. Another group began purchasing supplies with which they would build a playground for the grandchildren. The day before the project was to begin, the man returned.

The young woman was the first to see him. He was nearly unrecognizable. His nose had been shrunk down to a third of its original size. It fit his face perfectly. The strong, straight bridge of his nose stole down to an angular tip, framed by precisely shaped nostrils. But his eyes, they had lost their magnetism. Those eyes which had spoken so strongly of the stormy September ocean before, now simply appeared gray and vast. They no longer pierced the young woman's gaze with their intensity; instead, they gaped flatly and dumbly at her. His smile, which had been impossibly radiant before, now gave the impression of being toothy and belligerent. Instead of greeting the man, as he had expected, the young woman turned away as if she had never known him. As he walked through the streets of the town, no one looked his way. No one stopped in their tracks as they met his gaze. The man had become just that: an ordinary man.

The man left town as quickly as he had arrived. He headed straight for the house on the tallest hill in the field of hills. Board by board, the man tore down the house with his bare hands. He worked for hours, days, until nearly a week had passed. He piled the boards and encircled the pile with rocks he found in the streams and winding creeks. The breeze on the field stopped, and the flowers halted their dances. The man lit the piled remains of the house on fire and headed back to town. When he arrived, he went straight to the county deeds office and immediately transferred the property to the town. After the property transfer, the man once again disappeared.

The news that the town now owned the field of hills spread quickly. The townspeople hurriedly planned a celebration to take place at the field. They met at the town square, burdened with picnic baskets, fireworks, lawn chairs and coolers filled with beer and soda pop. All together, they walked towards the field of hills, marked by a plume of black smoke against the blue June sky. It took them an hour to reach their destination, and when they arrived, they were astonished. The beautiful, awe-inspiring, immensely desired northern field of hills looked identical to the fields of hills, valleys, streams and winding creeks bordering the town on the east, west and south sides. In the absence of the ugly weather-beaten house on the tallest hill, the flowers no longer danced joyfully. Instead, the colorful

weedy overgrowth swayed to and fro in the soft summer breeze, just like all the other flowers in all the other fields surrounding town.

These days, the town is much like it was before the ugly-nosed man came and went. The old folks of that era have since passed with the time, and the new old folks argue with the younger generation when they say “The field of hills would be a perfect place to build a park for our children, if only we could tear down that ugly old house.” When asked why the field of hills should be left alone, the old folks are unable to give a reason. Perhaps they don’t remember, or perhaps they’d rather forget.